

Jay D. Old Mouse

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Medium: wood

About the Artist:

Jay Old Mouse of Lame Deer is considered by the Northern Cheyenne to be the designated keeper and maker of the Cheyenne courting flute. The Cheyenne courting flute was handed down to Old Mouse through the lineage of known keepers, from Turkey Legs in the late 1800's, to Grover Wolf Voice, then to his grandfather Black Bear and then to Old Mouse himself. The honor and the flute-making skills were bestowed on him when he was in his early twenties by his grandfather with a long list of cultural protocols that he must follow, including living and honorable life, responding to requests to play the flute and handing the knowledge of the flute, its history, and the making of it to the next generation.

Old Mouse was a certified carpenter at the time he became the keeper and to this day, he uses the historical methods and protocols in making and playing the flute. He has made over 90 flutes in his lifetime and says humbly, "Thankfully, all of them have played."

About the Art:

The courting flute was originally used by a male suitor to attract a mate. It is also used in prayer, as a source of social entertainment, to honor individuals at events like funerals and birthdays, and as a tool to alleviate suffering. As told him by his grandfather, Old Mouse to the best of his ability, plays when asked, for example at funerals, graduations, in schools, in church, at weddings, and more. Because of his commitment to the protocols handed down to him and to providing comfort to his community through his performances, he is very highly regarded in his community.

Old Mouse wants to teach both natives and non-natives about the significance of the Cheyenne courting flute. To teach about the flute, he has presented at Cheyenne Frontier Days, the National Folk Festival in Butte, the Cheyenne Immersion Camp, American Indian Heritage Day at Miles City Community College, the American Indian Housing Initiative at Penn State, and for 20 years for the Cheyenne Trailriders international guests.

Photography by Bently Spang